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THE PRIZE

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A Play in One Act

BY

JOHN BARGATE

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THE PRIZE

CHARACTERS.

MRS. BOLTON.....*A young matron*
MRS. GRATZ..*A dressy widow of fifty—sharp fea-*
tured, keen-eyed
MISS PHYLLIS STONE.....*A girl of twenty-two—im-*
pulsive
MR. BOLTON..*An American business man of about*
forty years
MR. HARVEY STILES....*Brother of Mrs. Bolton—a*
bachelor of thirty years
MR. CRADDOCK STONE.....*Father of Phyllis—aged*
sixty years—stout, pompous
MAID.

THE PRIZE

SCENE:—*Scene opens in the drawing-room of the BOLTON residence. Half a dozen card tables, littered with cards, punch glasses and plates of candy are in the room. The chairs are pushed back from the tables.*

VOICE. (*from the next room on left*) No, it didn't come from Shrove's. I know it is, but it didn't come from there.

(*Enter MR. BOLTON on right.*)

I don't know where. I can't tell. My husband bought it, as I told you—I don't know where. What? I'll have to ask him—and I'll let you know. Good-bye. (*noise made in hanging up phone is heard*)

(*Enter MRS. BOLTON on left.*)

MRS. BOLTON. Oh dear! (*stops on seeing MR. BOLTON*) Why, John, you home? (*kisses him*)

MR. BOLTON. It looks like it. Who was it that you were telephoning to?

MRS. BOLTON. O, that was Mrs. Gratz!

MR. BOLTON. Mrs. B. McAlpine Gratz?

MRS. BOLTON. Yes—that absurd name is always in the society columns. She is so tiresome!

MR. BOLTON. Was it anything important?

MRS. BOLTON. No—something about a dress-maker. *(pause. He regards her)*

MR. BOLTON. *(looking at tables)* Your card party must have stayed late—it looks as if it had just broken up.

MRS. BOLTON. Yes, they have just gone.

MR. BOLTON. How you women can drink punch and eat sticky candy while you're handling cards, gets me!

MRS. BOLTON. *(laconically)* Everybody does it—I have to. It does make a muss. *(he goes to table on right. Looks at cards carefully—surprised, puts them in his pocket)*

MR. BOLTON. *(picks up some other cards gingerly and lets them fall)* Muss! I should say it did! *(walks to table on right and picks up some visiting cards. Reads)* Mr. T. Bacon Jones, Mr. T. Bacon Jones, Mrs. T. Bacon Jones, Mrs. T. Bacon Jones, Mr. T. Bacon Jones. *(plays out the cards as if dealing them)* Why, a full hand of T. Bacon Joneses. What bosh! Why do women go in for such rubbish?

MRS. BOLTON. Everybody does it. I had two ladies receiving with me the day Mrs. Jones called, and of course the proper thing is to leave a card for each.

MR. BOLTON. Then, if you had a dozen friends here, Mrs. T. Bacon Jones would leave a baker's dozen of her cards?

MRS. BOLTON. Certainly. She would have to——

MR. BOLTON. To be consistent. How do you explain the two cards of Mr. T. Bacon?

MRS. BOLTON. Why, he leaves one card for you and one for me.

MR. BOLTON. Oh, he does, does he? Not he—not if he knows it! Tom Jones—the crabbed old Scotchman—grubbing away in his musty office—he hasn't made a call in forty years. He wouldn't call on me, or anyone else, unless business made him. *(carelessly)* Who won the prize to-day?

MRS. BOLTON. Mrs. Gratz. She's a regular sharper. I can't bear that woman!

MR. BOLTON. Why do you invite her, then?

MRS. BOLTON. Well, you know she got into the Club, somehow, and she's such a fine bridge player—why, she's taken lessons of Ewell himself, and it's such good practice to play with her. Besides, she always dresses well, and the others like to see her clothes, and she's a friend of that Mrs. Steele's, who's invited me to three bridge parties this year, and——

MR. BOLTON. (*turning suddenly*) Ethel, why did you tell Mrs. Gratz that I bought the prize?

MRS. BOLTON. (*confused*) Why, I—well—I had to, John, I just had to.

MR. BOLTON. Perhaps the,—dressmaker made you.

MRS. BOLTON. Now, don't be sarcastic. I think you might help me.

MR. BOLTON. I will—if you'll tell me what it's all about. But, I don't see why you need to get into such mix-ups.

MRS. BOLTON. (*reproachfully*) John!

MR. BOLTON. (*sitting down*) Make a clean breast of it, Ethel. I want no evasions remember, or—dressmakers.

MRS. BOLTON. (*seating herself and nervously arranging a pack of cards*) Well, you know, the Club met here, and of course it was my turn to buy the prize—since our husbands will not allow us to play for the actual money. And——

MR. BOLTON. Just a moment. Where does the money come from to buy the prize?

MRS. BOLTON. From the Club.

MR. BOLTON. Oh, each member is assessed.

MRS. BOLTON. Yes, one dollar each.

MR. BOLTON. And there are fifty members, I think you said?

MRS. BOLTON. Yes.

MR. BOLTON. That makes fifty dollars. What did you buy, or rather, what did I buy, with it?

MRS. BOLTON. Well, I looked and searched the town over to find something suitable. We'd had nearly everything in the way of silverware, and—and——

MR. BOLTON. Do you mean to tell me that your Club has bought everything in this city—I mean, everything that can be bought for fifty dollars?

MRS. BOLTON. (*severely*) I said nearly everything in silverware. (*pause*) The only thing we hadn't had was a set of black coffee spoons. (*pause*)

MR. BOLTON. Well?

MRS. BOLTON. I went down town on purpose to look for black coffee spoons; and while I was looking at some sets I suddenly remembered that set we had given to us when we were married—you remember, the one we never used, because—well, because I never liked them—they were too small—regular doll's spoons.

MR. BOLTON. (*severely*) Ethel! You didn't turn in those spoons as a bridge prize?

MRS. BOLTON. What possible difference could it make if I did? They were really very pretty. Why, you look at me as if I had committed a crime!

MR. BOLTON. You furnished the Club with those spoons—that were presented to us by a friend—a wedding gift—and kept the fifty dollars!

MRS. BOLTON. Yes, I did. I couldn't see any harm in it; but you keep on making something dreadful out of it, instead of helping me out.

MR. BOLTON. The spoons didn't cost fifty dollars.

MRS. BOLTON. Didn't they? Oh, surely, they must have cost at least fifty! There were two dozen, you know, besides, a fancy sugar spoon, and they were all enameled and in a beautiful satin case.

MR. BOLTON. (*savagely*) Humph! Who gave us

the spoons? How do you know that the giver may not be a member of the Club?

MRS. BOLTON. That's impossible,—I thought of that. The spoons were sent to us by Mr. Stevens, of Boston.

MR. BOLTON. Poor devil! Little he thought what would become of his present!

MRS. BOLTON. John! How unkind!

MR. BOLTON. Who gave you the fifty dollars?

MRS. BOLTON. Phyllis—she's the Club Treasurer. She couldn't be here this afternoon.

MR. BOLTON. You spent it, I suppose?

MRS. BOLTON. Yes. I bought that lovely flower boa—chiffon and blush roses, the one that's been so much admired at Picot's. I'd a great deal rather have it than doll's spoons.

MR. BOLTON. A flower boa! I should think it would be a boa constrictor,—

MRS. BOLTON. And choke me, I suppose. Keep right on with your pleasantries—I can stand it—perhaps—(*tearfully*)

MR. BOLTON. Now, don't do the martyr act.

MRS. BOLTON. I fail to grasp your meaning. (*dignified*)

MR. BOLTON. It's no use, Ethel, you can't get out of it that way. (*pause*) You see, I know you too well.

MRS. BOLTON. Yet, I am in the hands of a friend.

MR. BOLTON. Yes, and I think your best friend. I can't see you pose and keep silent.

MRS. BOLTON. So—you humiliate me and glory in it!

MR. BOLTON. (*groans*) Flower Boa of Chiffon and blush roses! What am I to do?

MRS. BOLTON. You've got to help me out.

MR. BOLTON. Ugh! I don't like to be made part of a—lie.

MRS. BOLTON. John Bolton!

MR. BOLTON. Never mind being shocked, now, and never mind analyzing. We won't go into that. I like to call things by their right names,—then you know where you stand. What did Mrs. Gratz say?

MRS. BOLTON. (*sulkily*) She—she won the prize,——

MR. BOLTON. So you said.

MRS. BOLTON. And now, she wants to exchange it. So I told her—on the spur of the moment—it was over the telephone, you know,—and I didn't know what to say,—I said——

MR. BOLTON. I think I heard that part of it. You said “my husband bought it. I don't know where.” (*groans, raises his hands*) Chiffon rose and blushes!

MRS. BOLTON. (*tearfully*) I had no time to think of anything else. That woman is so sharp.

MR. BOLTON. What am I to do,—what am I to say to her, that is the question?

MRS. BOLTON. Nothing. Or anything you please. Only, don't talk to her as you've talked to me. The way you put it makes it all look so differently.

MR. BOLTON. I can't see how that is to mend matters. (*suddenly*) Where did she sit to-day? Did she move about?

MRS. BOLTON. She sat there, (*points to table on right*)—at the head table, the whole blessed afternoon, as if she'd been a statue fastened to that chair! Nothing could budge her!

MR. BOLTON. (*takes up another pack from table on right. Examines them. Aside*) Marked, too, by an expert! (*aloud*) Well, what am I to do?

MRS. BOLTON. Why, we'll wear her out, we'll just put her off. I'll do it—probably, you won't see her at all. Finally, even she must get tired of asking where it came from.

(*Bell rings.*)

Oh, perhaps that is Mrs. Gratz now! John, you mustn't be seen!

MR. BOLTON. Whoever comes here will have to see me. I will not hide from forty Mrs. Gratzes!

MRS. BOLTON. But, John, what will you say?

MR. BOLTON. I don't know. I'll not hide, that's settled. (*defiantly*)

MRS. BOLTON. Please, John dear, do go upstairs to your dark room! I'll tell her that you're developing photographs and can't be disturbed.

MR. BOLTON. No dark room for me. (*seats himself*) I prefer to let the light of day shine on all I do.

MRS. BOLTON. How self-righteous! Do you mean to tell me that there haven't been events in your life that you'd prefer to have developed in a dark room? (*pause*) The annual dinner of your College Frat, for instance?

MR. BOLTON. Botheration! Ethel, you know I'm not posing; but, a lie——

MRS. BOLTON. There's that awful word again. And that woman who's come to humiliate me, is probably, half way up stairs this minute!

(*Enter maid, with card.* MRS. BOLTON *reads.*)

Oh, it's only Phyllis! Show her up. (*exit maid*) What a relief!

(*Enter PHYLLIS STONE.* *She kisses* MRS. BOLTON.)

Oh, Phyllis, you are a darling! I never was so glad to see any one before!

PHYLLIS. Why, what's the matter? How d'ye do, Mr. Bolton? (*shakes hands with him.* *To* MRS.

BOLTON) I was so sorry not to be able to come to the party. How did it go? (MRS. BOLTON *does not reply*)

MR. BOLTON. (*gloomily*) How do you do?

PHYLLIS. (*surprised*) I'm quite well, thank you. (*looks from one to the other*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*impulsively*) John, I'm going to tell Phyllis all about it. Maybe she can help us out.

MR. BOLTON. Um! Perhaps she may know another dressmaker.

MRS. BOLTON. (*to him*) I think you might have a little Christian charity. Oh, Phyllis!

PHYLLIS. Whatever can be the matter?

MRS. BOLTON. Why, this: instead of buying the prize for the Club to-day, I gave them—(MR. BOLTON *winces*)—a beautiful new set of black coffee spoons, which was once given to me, but had not been used.

PHYLLIS. Well, what of it? I don't see anything wrong in that. (MR. BOLTON *gasps*)

MRS. BOLTON. You don't! (*joyfully*)

PHYLLIS. No.

MRS. BOLTON. (*triumphantly*) Now, John, you see, Phyllis doesn't see anything wrong in it.

PHYLLIS. Certainly, I do not. You used some new spoons for a prize, instead of buying others. Well?

MR. BOLTON. She turned in an old wedding present of spoons, which she hadn't used because they were too small, and kept the money! (*raises his hands. Aside*) Blushes and chiffon!

MRS. BOLTON. What could I do with the money? Throw it away? Perhaps, you'd have me send it to Boston, to Mr. Stevens who gave us the spoons?

MR. BOLTON. That would be more honorable than keeping it. Fifty dollars for a flower string! (*sighs*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*indignantly*) It isn't a string!

PHYLLIS. What is the trouble? It is done now.

MRS. BOLTON. Yes, and everything would be all right except that that tiresome Mrs. Gratz wants to exchange the prize.

PHYLLIS. She won it? (MRS. BOLTON *nods*)

MR. BOLTON. She wants to exchange the prize so that she can prize the exchange—keep it on hand for swapping purposes.

PHYLLIS. How greedy of her!

MRS. BOLTON. Isn't it?

PHYLLIS. (*to* MRS. BOLTON) Do you suppose she has heard about the plates?

MR. BOLTON. (*sternly*) What plates? If there's any more underhand business in this affair, I want to know it.

MRS. BOLTON. Mercy! How you do snap one up, John!

PHYLLIS. Now, Mr. Bolton, I never thought you "a snapper up of unconsidered trifles."

MRS. BOLTON. "Underhand work," I think you said. One would think I concealed cards up my sleeve and regularly cheated.

MR. BOLTON. How shocking, my dear! I'd never think of laying a charge of dishonesty at your door.

MRS. BOLTON. You're sarcastic and—horrid.

MR. BOLTON. I want the truth about the plates.

PHYLLIS. (*offering him a plate of candy*) These are the only plates the Club has seen to-day. Have some—it's taffy—do!

MR. BOLTON. No, thank you.

MRS. BOLTON. (*offering him a plate of candy*) Do have some of mine—"sweetheart kisses"—they're the latest thing!

MR. BOLTON. (*smiles and moves away*) Go away, both of you! Incurables! (*he walks across stage and back. Seriously*) I'm not be bought off with taffy. If there's anything more to know about those plates, I want to know it.

MRS. BOLTON. Of course there's nothing more. The plates were a prize at a meeting before this, at Mrs. Hunt's.

PHYLLIS. What do you think Mrs. Hunt does?
(to MR. BOLTON)

MR. BOLTON. I give it up. (*sighs*)

PHYLLIS. Why, when she wins a prize, she takes it straight back to Shrove's, or wherever it came from, and has it credited to her. Then, when the credit amounts to \$200.00 she gets something she really wants.

MR. BOLTON. What delicacy! Boas and blushes!

MRS. BOLTON. John! Don't say that silly thing again. If you do I shall *scream!!!* What am I to do? Oh, Phyllis, do help me!

PHYLLIS. There must be some way out of it, if we could only find it. (*pause*) If your brother were only here, Ethel, he's so clever, I'm sure he could find a way.

MRS. BOLTON. Harvey? He's upstairs now. I'll call him.

MR. BOLTON. (to MRS. BOLTON) I shouldn't think you'd care about having any more people know about this—affair.

MRS. BOLTON. (*haughtily*) My own brother is loyal enough to help me out of a difficulty.

(*Exit MRS. BOLTON.*)

PHYLLIS. I'll tell you how we could explain it!
(*excitedly*)

MR. BOLTON. (*skeptically*) How?

PHYLLIS. We'll say that Papa bought the spoons!

MR. BOLTON. Your father! He would never be a party to such deception.

PHYLLIS. He need never know anything about it. You see——

{Enter MRS. BOLTON and MR. STILES. *Running to meet them.*}

I've found a way! How do you do, Harvey?

MR. STILES. I'm quite well, thank you—and as usual, Miss Phyllis is as blooming as a rose.

PHYLLIS. Thank you. I'm so glad you're at home, because I told Ethel that I was sure you could get her out of this scrape.

MR. STILES. I'm immensely flattered, I'm sure,—

MRS. BOLTON. I've told Harvey everything and he says he'll arrange it.

MR. STILES. I said I'd try, Ethel.

MRS. BOLTON. Well, that's the same thing. What did you think of, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS. My plan is to say that Papa bought the spoons.

MRS. BOLTON. Your father! Oh, Phyllis, he never would!

PHYLLIS. What an artless creature you are, Ethel! Of course I don't mean to tell him. But we'll tell Mrs. Gratz something like this: (*the rest gather round her while she counts the points off on her fingers*) I meet Mr. Bolton on his way to buy the prize, (MR. BOLTON *squirms*) and he tells me of his dislike for the undertaking. (MR. BOLTON and MR. STILES *regard her with astonishment. She goes glibly on*). Whereupon, I offer to ask Papa to buy it——

MR. STILES. My dear Phyllis, don't you think it a little strange that Mr. Craddock Stone, banker, should buy a prize for Ether's Bridge Club?

PHYLLIS. Not if I asked him to.

MR. STILES. True. It's not probable that any man would refuse to do anything that you asked of him.

PHYLLIS. Besides, (*smiles and bows*) Papa could

get a discount—because—he owns the building in which is the big jewelry and silversmith's store, in—where did you say the spoons came from, Ethel?

MRS. BOLTON. From Boston.

PHYLLIS. (*continuing*) In Boston, a big silversmith's store in Papa's building in Boston.

MR. STILES. But, Phyllis, your father doesn't own any such building.

MR. BOLTON. That needn't make any difference—don't mind a little thing like that.

PHYLLIS. (*to MR. STILES*) How is Mrs. Gratz to find that out? To continue, I offer to relieve Mr. Bolton by getting Papa to buy the prize, in order to get a discount—and—(*brightening*) save the Club money.

MR. BOLTON. I absolutely—(*MRS. BOLTON goes to him hastily and whispers*)

PHYLLIS. Mr. Bolton gives me the fifty dollars and I promise not to tell Ethel. Ethel, of course, doesn't know a word of all this and believes that she is telling the truth——

MR. BOLTON. Um!

PHYLLIS. When she tells Mrs. Gratz that Mr. Bolton bought the prize.

MR. STILES. What a charming—prevaricator you are, Phyllis!

MR. BOLTON. Humph! A charming all round—

MRS. BOLTON. John! (*To PHYLLIS*) Your plan is just simply fine! It is so good of you to help me! What do you think of it, Harvey?

MR. STILES. It's all right, as a sort of a joke, you know—as far as it goes. But—but, it doesn't go far enough, exactly.

PHYLLIS. Then we'll make it go farther. What is the matter with it?

MR. STILES. Why, you've simply moved the difficulty from John to your father. If Mr. Stone

bought the prize, Mrs. Gratz will ask him to exchange it.

PHYLLIS. (*triumphantly*) Papa never exchanges anything!

MR. STILES. He might, when it isn't his own. This is a Club matter.

PHYLLIS. (*decidedly*) I shall tell her that he never does it—it's against his principles. Besides, you forget that Papa will never know anything about it.

MR. STILES. No, that's true—at least we hope he won't. With such a pushing woman as Mrs Gratz—

(*Enter maid with card.*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*reads card*) "Mrs. B. McAlpine Gratz!" Good gracious! What shall I do? Hush! She always follows her card.

(*Enter MRS. GRATZ.*)

Ah, Mrs. Gratz, I'm so glad to be at home.

MRS. GRATZ. Thank you. I thought the phone was rather unsatisfactory, so I just ran in. How are you, Miss Stone? We missed you at the Club to-day. Mr. Stiles, (*bows to him*) Mr. Bolton, I am very glad that you are at home.

MR. BOLTON. (*grimly*) Thank you.

MRS. GRATZ. I called——

PHYLLIS. Oh, Mrs. Gratz, I've been wanting to meet you, because—(*hesitates*)

MRS. GRATZ. You could have called upon me, Miss Stone, which you've never done, although I've asked you times enough.

PHYLLIS. I know, Mrs. Gratz, I am very much to blame; but there's so little calling done now-a-days, I mean the old-fashioned way of making calls—just give and take, you know——

MRS. BOLTON. Yes, that sort of book-keeping calling is altogether out of date.

PHYLLIS. Quite. One calls to acknowledge a courtesy or—or something of that sort.

MRS. GRATZ. To put it plainly, you believe that people call only upon the rich, who entertain?

PHYLLIS. O, no, dear Mrs. Gratz, not at all! You entirely misunderstood us. But, to continue, I've been hoping I'd meet you because I wanted to ask you—won't you let me loosen your wrap, Mrs. Gratz, let me do it for you—you'll get cold when you go out. There! (*places wrap on chair near MRS. BOLTON. Aside to MRS. BOLTON*) Get John Bolton out of the room!

MRS. GRATZ. (*to MR. BOLTON*) I said that I was very glad that you were at home, Mr. Bolton, because——

PHYLLIS. Oh, Mrs. Gratz, pardon me for interrupting, but really I did have the floor and I was just about to say that I had been longing to meet you to ask you to join the loveliest little class in fencing. There are just six of us, and Moskowsky is able to give us so much more attention than he could in his larger classes.

MRS. GRATZ. Who are the members?

PHYLLIS. Dorothy Reeves, the three Dalton girls, Ethel and myself.

MRS. GRATZ. Thank you. I'll join it. Those society girls will make it attractive. I don't know them, but I'd like to. I've always been considered good at one kind of fencing.

MRS. BOLTON. (*aside to MR. BOLTON*) Do go upstairs!

MR. BOLTON. (*aside to MRS. BOLTON*) I'll not leave this room.

MRS. GRATZ. As I remarked twice before, Mr. Bolton, I'm extremely glad that you are at home, be-

cause I called in regard to my prize, which I won to-day and which I am told that you bought. Where did it come from. Mr. Bolton?

MR. BOLTON. (*feebly*) I—I presume the name of the silversmith on the box will tell you.

MRS. GRATZ. No, it won't. The box is from Shrove's. But I took it there and they said the spoons hadn't been bought from them. Where were they bought?

MR. BOLTON. Great Scott, Madame!—How——

PHYLLIS. I have a little confession to make, Mrs. Gratz—it's quite like a play, (*laughs*) isn't it? I know you'll enjoy it, because you're so fond of the theater. But, do sit down! (*places chairs for MRS. GRATZ and herself*)

MR. STILES. (*aside to PHYLLIS*) Don't tell her that yarn.

PHYLLIS. (*aside to MR. STILES*) Why not?

MR. STILES. (*aside to PHYLLIS*) Because I ask you not to. (*she tosses her head*) I know, of course, that you regard the matter as a joke; but we can't joke with that woman.

MRS. GRATZ. (*to MR. BOLTON*) They told me at Shrove's that because the spoons were in one of their boxes it didn't prove anything. They said that lots of people used their boxes for things they bought anywhere.

MR. STILES. "Things bought anywhere!" Fancy receiving a baby alligator or a boa constrictor in one of Shrove's boxes!

MR. BOLTON. A boa—chiffon blushes!

MR. STILES. What's the matter, John? You're ranting!

MRS. BOLTON. He's only trying to steady my nerves by pleasant allusions to——

MRS. GRATZ. (*bridling*) Allusions not understood by us.

MRS. BOLTON. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Gratz.

MRS. GRATZ. Don't mention it. I'm not to be turned from my purpose by allusions to things I don't understand.

PHYLLIS. But, my dear Mrs. Gratz, wait until you hear what I have to say. It will explain everything.

MR. BOLTON. (*aside*) A lot it will!

MRS. GRATZ. I shall be glad to hear it.

MRS. BOLTON. (*aside to MR. STILES*) Phyllis is so clever!

MR. STILES. (*aside to MRS. BOLTON*) Yes, she seems to be devilish clever.

MRS. BOLTON. Harvey, you ought to go on your knees to her for getting me out of this awful scrape, instead of acting the bear like John.

MR. STILES. (*aside to MRS. BOLTON*) Well, she hasn't got you out of it yet.

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) I'm awfully afraid she'll never be able to fool that woman.

PHYLLIS. (*who has been arranging cushions on MRS. GRATZ'S chair. She comes L. MRS. G.—by players—this scene until PHYLLIS speaks*) Why, you see, it was this way. I met Mr. Bolton on his way to buy the prize—on a Thursday—no, that's my day at home—still, it might have been——

MR. STILES. Much more likely to have been, I should think; for I believe some ladies rarely stay at home on their days.

PHYLLIS. Now, Mr. Stiles, you only found me out on two Thursdays.

MRS. GRATZ. (*irritably*) It doesn't make any difference what day it was. What did you say to Mr. Bolton when you met him?

PHYLLIS. He told me—(*MR. BOLTON utters an exclamation and goes hastily to window*) that he was on his way to buy a prize for the Club, because it would meet at Ethel's next time. And he said he

was puzzled—he was at his wit's end to know what to buy. So I offered to ask Papa to buy it for him,—

MRS. GRATZ. (*surprised*) Your father! Why should he buy the prize?

PHYLLIS. (*glibly*) Because, you see, he owns the building occupied by the silversmith who sold the spoons; and for that reason he could get them at a discount. (*the others gasp, except MRS. GRATZ*)

MRS. GRATZ. Humph! Where is this building?

PHYLLIS. In Boston. The spoons came from Boston.

MRS. GRATZ. Then I shall have to ask your father to be kind enough to exchange them for me.

PHYLLIS. I'm sorry, but it really wouldn't be any use, dear Mrs. Gratz, because Papa never exchanges anything,—it's against his principles. He'll do anything I ask him—if I ask him real hard—except that—he never exchanges anything!

MR. STILES. (*who has been talking to MR. BOLTON*) And now, Mrs. Gratz, that you have heard the explanation, will you not—(*offers his arm*) let me show you some rarely beautiful amethysts which were purchased in Havana, during the Cuban War? They are in the library, and as the others have seen them we'll not ask them to accompany us. (*MRS. GRATZ reluctantly takes his arm*) You see, during the war—(*moving off*) there was great financial distress among many of the wealthy families and they were obliged to part with their jewels,—

(*Exeunt MRS. GRATZ and MR. STILES.*)

MRS. BOLTON. Oh, I thought she'd never go! Phyllis! (*embraces her*) How did you ever manage it?

PHYLLIS. It wasn't easy. (*thoughtfully*) And I'm not sure that she believed me.

MRS. BOLTON. O, she's got to! At least, she's got to make believe she believes you.

MR. BOLTON. (*coming forward*) Believes you? Not she—not a bit of it.

MRS. BOLTON. When a woman's own husband won't stand by her——

MR. BOLTON. I am standing by you—I've got to—it's the only thing left for me to do; but that doesn't force me to believe that black is white.

MRS. BOLTON. (*indignantly*) You might think it is, especially since it doesn't make any difference whether it is or not.

MR. BOLTON. (*restlessly walking to back of room*) Damn!

MRS. BOLTON. (*injured*) John! Please do not offend us.

MR. BOLTON. Oh! (*mutters*)

PHYLLIS. (*laughs*) Think of poor Harvey showing that old frump those amethysts!

MRS. BOLTON. He'd better watch them.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Ethel, she's not so bad as that!

MRS. BOLTON. Nobody knows anything about her people, or where she came from; and such a woman is capable of anything.

PHYLLIS. It's always so bad when no one knows anything about a person's family. (MR. BOLTON *continues to gaze from window*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*lowering her voice. Aside to PHYLLIS*) A man did tell John something about her, but it wasn't creditable.

PHYLLIS. (*eagerly*) What was it?

MRS. BOLTON. (*aside to PHYLLIS*) I'm not sure that I ought to tell you.

PHYLLIS. (*same*) If you don't, after telling me this much, I call it shabby of you.

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) Well, it was a man who had known Mrs. Gratz years ago in—in, well, I forget

the name of the place, but it was where she formerly lived.

PHYLLIS. Ethel Bolton, do go on!

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) I didn't really hear what he said. But I know, just as well as though I had, that it was something disgraceful. John never will say one word against a woman.

PHYLLIS. Then how do you know?

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) Why, I can always tell by the expression of his face, just what he thinks; and whenever Mrs. Gratz's name is mentioned he always looks as though he had been caught stealing sheep.

PHYLLIS. How perfectly dreadful! I always knew there was something about that woman.

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) Isn't it? Now, if that doesn't mean that she was more than giddily gay when she was young, I don't know what it does mean.

MR. BOLTON. (*coming down*) Well, have you finished her? She should be in bits by this time.

MRS. BOLTON. You don't like her yourself, John.

MR. BOLTON. I admit it; but give the devil his due.

PHYLLIS. I wouldn't be seen on the street with her for anything!

MRS. BOLTON. Neither would I. Why, the clerks in the stores just dread to see her come in. She'll look at everything and, maybe, at the end of an hour she'll buy nothing at all.

MR. BOLTON. Then, she's what is called "a fake shopper."

MRS. BOLTON. No, not exactly, because she generally does buy things in the end. But, she's a fussy, tiresome shopper. I've seen her at it and I'd rather take a whipping than go shopping with her.

PHYLLIS. So would I.

(*Enter maid with card.*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*reads*) "Mr. Stone!" Your father, Phyllis! He hasn't been here for an age!

PHYLLIS. Papa! (*looks around*) Where are my things? He's called for me,—I'll make some excuse and get him away. (*hastily puts on her wrap*)

MR. BOLTON. (*looking toward door*) You're too late. This Sweedish princess we've got doesn't wait for orders. She's showing him upstairs now.

(*Enter MR. STONE.*)

MRS. BOLTON. How do you do, Mr. Stone, I hope you're quite well this cold weather?

MR. STONE. Thank you, Madame, I am quite well. How are you, Bolton? (*the men shake hands*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*aside to PHYLLIS*) You'll have to tell him, Phyllis! Mrs. Gratz will be back any minute and she's bound to ask him!

PHYLLIS. (*aside to MRS. BOLTON. Doubtfully*) He'll be frightfully angry and cross, and—and he'll never believe me again.

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) O, yes he will! You can explain it to him afterwards,—tell him it was a sort of lark we'd put up on Mrs. Gratz.

PHYLLIS. (*same*) He wouldn't think it a lark.

MR. STONE. (*to BOLTON*) Your wife must see a great deal of my daughter. It seems to me that she's always here. (*looks fondly at PHYLLIS*) And to-day, in her eagerness to be here,—she quite forgot an—engagement with her old father. (*puffs*)

PHYLLIS. (*going to him*) So I did, Papa. You'll have to forgive me; but we'll go right now.

MR. STONE. After a little, my dear. Even were one so lacking in breeding—as to enter and leave a friend's house in such a short space of—time—he

would be obliged, at my age, to show proper deference to stairs. (*puffs*)

PHYLLIS. I thought you were in a hurry—you said you had waited for me.

MR. STONE. Hurry? No, I am not in a hurry, I am never in a hurry. Hurry, hurry, hurry,—it is the curse of the age!

PHYLLIS. But, Papa——

MR. STONE. Repose, my dear, and permanence of domicile are the best evidences of an aristocracy.

PHYLLIS. (*looking at MRS. BOLTON in despair*) But, Papa, we were going to look at the pictures, you remember; and I'm afraid it will be too dark unless we go immediately. The cards,—I mean, the days are so short now.

MR. STONE. (*settling himself in an arm chair*) Then we will not attempt to view them to-day. There are other days,—and we'll not hurry.

PHYLLIS. The exhibition closes very soon, maybe to-day. Ethel will excuse us, I know.

MRS. BOLTON. Why, certainly. Don't think of standing on ceremony with me, Mr. Stone.

MR. STONE. Madame, your society is preferable to pictures, be they masterpieces!

PHYLLIS. But I want to see them very much.

MR. STONE. You must, my dear, very much indeed, when you forget all about your appointment with me for that purpose. Nothing you can say will move me now. (*to PHYLLIS*) *I will not be hurried!* There is one thing that I wish you would cultivate, my dear, and that is repose. It is one of the greatest charms of woman. Now, you cultivate repose, while I talk reciprocity to Bolton. It's a big subject, eh, Bolton?

PHYLLIS. (*to MRS. BOLTON*) I suppose he'd have me try to copy the expression of the Sphinx!

MR. BOLTON. (*to MR. STONE*) It is indeed.

Reciprocity is merely carrying the standard for the individual and applying it to nations. As I do to you, so must I expect you will do to me. (*he regards Mrs. BOLTON*)

MR. STONE. My sentiments exactly, exactly. (*voices are heard*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*aside to PHYLLIS. Desperately*) Tell him, Phyllis,—if you love me, tell him!

PHYLLIS. Papa dear, you remember, of course, that Cousin Matilda told us that a firm of silver-smiths occupied a store in that building you own in Boston?

MR. STONE. I remember nothing of the sort.

PHYLLIS. She certainly said, one of the stores.

MR. STONE. (*emphatically*) Not at all, not at all! The entire building is occupied, and has been this ten years, by Smith & Stratton, booksellers.

PHYLLIS. But they might have sublet a part——

MR. BOLTON. (*aside to PHYLLIS, hastily*) Not a word more! I forbid it!

MR. STONE. What's got into you, Phyllis? I didn't know that you knew that I owned a building in Boston. You must have dreamt about the silver-smith.

PHYLLIS. Yes, yes,—I must have dreamt it.

MR. BOLTON. (*aside*) Oh, Lord!

PHYLLIS. (*aside to Mr. BOLTON*) How can you desert Ethel, and make me desert her too?

MR. BOLTON. (*aside to PHYLLIS*) Not a word more or I'll tell the whole thing!

MR. STONE. (*to Mr. BOLTON*) Strange, what notions a girl will get into her artless little head. Eh, Bolton?

MR. BOLTON. Oh, yes, certainly,—very artless,—Ha, ha, ha!

MR. STONE. Ha, ha, ha! She's so honest, so innocent,—blurts everything right out, and expects

people to straighten out all the tangles she's caused. But, she's right, God bless her! Give me artlessness every time!

MR. BOLTON. I agree with you perfectly. (*looks at PHYLLIS and MRS. BOLTON*)

MR. STONE. (*to PHYLLIS*) Little innocent! Not to know the difference between a dream and reality! Dreamt that I owned a building in Boston, dreamt that it was occupied by a silversmith! Ha, ha, ha! (*MR. BOLTON places decanter and glasses on table beside MR. STONE. He pours out wine. They hold up glasses*) The old toast, eh, Bolton? (*raises his glass*) "Sweethearts and wives!"

MR. BOLTON. "Sweethearts and wives! may they never meet!" (*he looks at MRS. BOLTON*)

MRS. BOLTON. (*indignant and injured*) Keep right on, I am being punished, I presume.

MR. BOLTON. (*aside to MRS. BOLTON*) Not another word about the prize,—I forbid it!

MRS. BOLTON. (*aside to MR. BOLTON*) You want to see me exposed, humiliated before that woman?

MR. BOLTON. (*aside to MRS. BOLTON*) You should have thought of that before you started this tissue of falsehoods.

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) It's like you to reproach me!

MR. BOLTON. (*same*) Leave it to me. I propose to take a hand.

MRS. BOLTON. (*same*) Oh, John, if you only will! I'm so sorry, and I'll promise never to do such a thing again!

PHYLLIS. (*to MR. STONE*) I'm waiting, Papa dear. Aren't you rested yet?

MR. STONE. (*testily*) I supposed I am, if I were going to catch a train. But, it isn't the way I was brought up, to dash in and out of a gentleman's house in this fashion. (*rises*)

(Enter MRS. GRATZ and MR. STILES.)

MR. STILES. (*seeing MR. STONE*) There! (*to MRS. GRATZ*) I've forgotten the most beautiful thing of all,—the gem of the collection. Let me show it to you—(*he tries to draw her through the doorway*) You really shouldn't miss it, Mrs. Gratz!

MRS. GRATZ. Thank you. But, I should like very much to meet Miss Stone's father. (*comes forward*) Mrs. Bolton, will you present me to Mr. Craddock Stone, for this gentleman is he, I believe?

MRS. BOLTON. (*faintly*) Allow me—to present Mrs. Gratz, Mr. Stone.

MRS. GRATZ. I've often heard of you, sir, and I'm delighted to meet you, especially on this occasion, for we're both interested in a little transaction, I believe.

MR. STONE. Madame, at your service. (*bows*) But, I fail to understand you.

MR. STILES. (*taking the hand of PHYLLIS. Aside to her*) Don't be frightened, little girl. It's coming, but I'll back you up.

PHYLLIS. (*aside to MR. STILES*) Oh, what shall I do!

MR. STILES. (*same*) Nothing. Promise not to tell any more whoppers and I'll back you up all your life.

PHYLLIS. (*same*) And,—if I don't promise?

MR. STILES. (*same*) But you will, I know you will. Promise me, Phyllis!

PHYLLIS. (*same*) I promise.

MR. BOLTON. (*he gives PHYLLIS some money unseen by any one except MR. STILES. Aside to PHYLLIS*) Here's fifty dollars,—the Club's money! Put it in your pocket.

PHYLLIS. (*aside to MR. BOLTON*) But I haven't any pocket.

MR. BOLTON. (*same*) Hold it in your hand, then! (*savagely*)

MRS. GRATZ. (*to* MR. STONE) Perhaps you'll understand me when I ask you where you bought——

MR. BOLTON. (*going between them*) Pardon me. I feel that an explanation is due both of you. To you, Mrs. Gratz, because the prize you won here to-day at the meeting of the Bridge Club was a present to the Club from my wife, who kindly left the matter in my hands. Mr. Stone did not buy the prize, nor did I.

MR. STONE. I? What have I to do with ladies' Bridge Clubs?

MR. BOLTON. I'll explain presently, Mr. Stone. As I said before, the Club was presented with the prize you won, Mrs. Gratz; and I paid the fifty dollars given to my wife to be expended in the purchase of a prize, to Miss Stone, the treasurer of the Club.

MRS. GRATZ. (*grimly*) And Miss Stone's confession that her father bought the prize?

MR. STONE. (*excitedly*) Thunder and lightning! Madame, you must have taken leave of your senses!

MR. BOLTON. That was a rehearsal for some private theatricals; for which deception, Mrs. Gratz, we all owe you an apology.

PHYLLIS. I, most of all, am to blame. Will you forgive me, dear Mrs. Gratz?

MRS. GRATZ. I suppose I must forgive a most peculiar affair. I was suspicious from the first.

MR. BOLTON. Of what, madame?

MRS. GRATZ. Of underhand work where Mrs. Bolton was concerned.

MR. BOLTON. You are speaking of my wife. Explain!

MRS. GRATZ. Well, a woman who would win the *same plates, twice*, at the Club's meetings, and have them applied twice on her own account with Tamp &

Co.—where they came from—would be capable of peculiar transactions. Mr. Bolton, your wife did that!

(MR. BOLTON *must come to her and talk during other speeches.*)

MR. STILES. (*aside to PHYLLIS*) Poor John!

PHYLLIS. (*aside to MR. STILES*) Ethel looks as if she were going to faint! That horrid woman!

MR. STILES. (*same*) It will be a good lesson to Ethel,—and others.

MR. STONE. (*aside to MRS. BOLTON*) The woman is certainly demented.

MRS. GRATZ. (*to MR. BOLTON*) Am I to understand that by reason of your generosity to the Club, I get, instead of a fifty dollar prize, a left-over, misfit, job lot of useless spoons?

MR. BOLTON. It is by no means compulsory. You need not take the gift, Mrs. Gratz. If you prefer, you may return the spoons to the Club treasurer, to be held in trust for the Club, and the fifty dollars may be expended for anything you choose.

MRS. GRATZ. In that case, I'll take it now.

(*She holds out her hand to PHYLLIS.*)

MR. BOLTON. That would hardly be in accord with the rules of the Club. The money may be expended for anything you choose,—provided, that Miss Stone and Mrs. Bolton accompany you on your shopping expedition and approve of your selection.

(MRS. BOLTON and MISS STONE *look aghast.*)

PHYLLIS. (*aside to MR. STILES*) What! Go with that detestable——

MRS. GRATZ. I absolutely decline to submit to any such conditions. The fifty dollars is mine, fairly won——

MR. BOLTON. (*aside to MRS. GRATZ*) (*He takes the marked cards from his pocket and shows them to her, unseen by the others*) Fairly won? With these cards?

MRS. GARTZ. (*alarmed*) Oh!

MR. BOLTON. (*same*) Well?

MRS. GRATZ. (*same*) One cannot use marked cards in bridge!

MR. BOLTON. (*same*) O, yes, one can. They serve to give away the other hands. (*pause*)

MRS. GRATZ. (*sullenly*) What do you wish me to do?

MR. BOLTON. (*aside to MRS. GRATZ*) You will resign from the Club. Do you accept my terms?

MRS. GRATZ. (*same. Shortly*) Yes.

MR. BOLTON. (*aloud*) On second thought, Mrs. Gratz, have you consented to accept my conditions?

MRS. GRATZ. (*grimly*) I accept them.

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